

From the Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry News Desk

January 26, 2026

(It's been a very long time since the last Wittenberg Door newsletter, dated in June of 2025. We're still here. This is the start of a new format for passing around our news, long overdue.)

We are currently in the season of Epiphany, which began on January 6, as it does every year. This is one of the earliest known annual celebrations, with recognitions as early as the fourth century. Due to a question about the revisions of the calendar, from the Julian to the Gregorian system in the 16th century, there has historically been some dispute about whether Epiphany and Christmas are the same celebration. The calendar change can be understood as displacing December 25 to January 6.

Epiphany has normalized to center on the visit of the Magi to Jesus, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, chapter two. Here they appear, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which are often seen as symbolic of Christ's kingly nature, his priestly role, and his impending death.

Within much of the Western church tradition, the season of Epiphany lasts from January 6 until the day before Ash Wednesday, which changes in date depending on the date of Easter. Traditional readings during this season focus on realizing, bit by bit, just how great Jesus is as God the Son. We are therefore invited into the remainder of the church year, with sorrow for our sin, recognition that Jesus is the one who can and will take away our sin, and a desire to look forward to the Easter season, when we specially recognize that Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin through his death, and that he is the first of the resurrection of the dead.



The visit of the Magi has inspired many artists over the centuries. They often put the characters in their paintings into the guise of people of their own culture. The adoration of Jesus gives us much room to reflect on the nature of Jesus and to adore him ourselves. Here's an image of a fresco by Giotto. The work is in the Scrovegni chapel in Padua, Italy, and is approximately six feet square. This reproduction is considered public domain in the United States and many other jurisdictions because the original artwork (fresco by Giotto) is in the public domain (the artist died in 1337).

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Call Process Update

Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry was founded in 2015 by Pastor Dave Spotts (writing this article). At the time of founding, one of the goals for the ministry was that it would be able to issue a full-time call to someone before Pastor Spotts retires. Retirement seems to be getting closer with each passing year. Because of our desire for a smooth transition, and because we know the call process may take a while, the Wittenberg Door Board of Directors agreed in 2025 to move us into the process of calling our next campus chaplain. This process looks different in Lutheran circles than it does in many other church bodies, and very different than the corporate personnel search seen in much of American life.

At the foundation of the call process is the concept that a pastor or chaplain has what we would refer to as a "divine call." This means we who issue the call are consciously attempting to discern God's will and the way He would provide for the organization, as well as for the needs of the person who is being called.

1 Timothy 5:17-20 speaks of the duty of honoring, paying, respecting, defending, and holding accountable the "elders" (The New Testament uses "elders" and "bishops" as synonyms for the word "pastor," which is less commonly used) who serve the congregation. 1 Timothy 3:2 describes the character qualities of a bishop (elder/pastor). The leader is to be someone who has been developed in many important character qualities. In verse six, Paul tells Timothy the bishop should not be "a novice" (NKJV). This indicates maturity and points to a time period of intense training.

Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry is committed to providing face-to-face *pastoral* care on campus. By "pastoral care" we intend this to be the kind of Christian care that an ordained minister is specially trained to do. As a ministry of the American Association of Lutheran Churches, this means that we would call only a person who is on our church body's roster of ordained clergy to serve as the chaplain. This assures us that our next campus chaplain has been prepared with seminary education, extensive background checks, significant periods of ministry work under supervision, and is qualified to serve in any of the church body's congregations as a pastor. The review given to men preparing for this service is rigorous and extensive. It is intended to protect them and our congregations, as we want the best possible shepherds for God's flock.

The AALC is currently working through a pastor shortage. This is a common report in many church bodies at present. However, we have a good crop of young (and older) men in our seminary, moving toward the completion of their M.Div. degrees, and who will be promising graduates. At some point, the national office of The AALC will begin sending candidates to us, one at a time. The Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry Board of Directors will make sure the candidates spend some time around Columbia, meet with some of our participants, and help us discern how they might fit in. Campus ministry is a little different from ministry in a local parish. We want to find the person who will be a very good fit for many years to come. After appropriate time is spent for discernment and prayer, the Board of Directors, on behalf of all the participants of Wittenberg Door, will have an up or down vote. We normally do things by consensus, and expect that a decision to issue a call will be unanimous.

One area in which Wittenberg Door is slightly behind in this process is that of being able to offer a reasonable living income to our next chaplain. Though we celebrate the generosity of our donors, Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry is not able to pay a pastoral salary. For the past few years, the ministry has been able to pay for housing and transportation as well as the routine operating

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expenses of the ministry. However, we have been hovering at about 50% of our board-approved budget. Without an increase in the ability to pay a salary, we will not be able to call a new chaplain.

To help with the call process, I'm asking that people who care about the work of this ministry commit to prayer, without which nothing happens. I'm also asking that those who are able would step forward with financial support, and that everyone would share the opportunity of campus ministry with others who are able to provide financial and prayer support. Bringing face-to-face pastoral care to the students, faculty, staff, administrators, and families of the college communities in Columbia Missouri does matter. It's priceless.

We'll keep trying to identify a next chaplain. I hope you'll try to help us in that as well, and see that we can provide well for the future work of campus ministry here.

Financial Update

If you've been watching the life of Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry for some time, you are aware that we are a mission work of The American Association of Lutheran Churches. As such, we spend some time asking people for money so as to keep the doors open. I think this is an especially challenging kind of mission work. Much of the work we do is with people who are not in a position to provide financial support. Many are from other countries in the developing world and will not expect to have a robust income in their future lives. Since we aren't trying to form a permanent congregation, as would be done with a church plant, many people don't automatically recognize the special funding needs we face.

- Pastor Spotts is not employed by any of the college campuses where he is engaged in ministry.
- Pastor Spotts is not on the staff of any local church congregation.
- We receive some funding from The American Association of Lutheran Churches Commission for American Missions. This makes approximately six percent of our annual budget.
- To fully fund this mission work, we estimate an annual budget of slightly over \$100,000 per year.
- Some of our loyal supporters, both individuals and congregations, are part of what we call the Wittenberg Door 300. They support us financially on a repeating basis.
- Our estimate is that if we have about 300 supporters, we can make budget and keep one or more staff members engaged full-time in campus outreach and care for souls.

In 2025 Wittenberg Door received gifts representing about 50% of our annual budget. While this was adequate for the day-to-day needs of the ministry as well as providing housing for Pastor Spotts, it did not provide for a salary or the ability of the ministry to contribute to any sort of retirement or benefit plan, or to contribute to The American Association of Lutheran Churches, our umbrella organization.

As of the end of January, 2026, we have logged income amounting to about 1% of our budget. There are several quarterly supporters who are likely to send gifts during February or March.

With that said, the financial needs are great. An important key element in the call process we described last week is being able to provide adequate care for a full-time chaplain. If you are able to step forward with financial support, this would be a wonderful time to start! It's gifts such as yours that

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can keep this Christ-centered, cross-focused, in-person pastoral care going in the collegiate communities. Please share this need with others who may be interested in supporting our work.

Thank you for your support. We are your servants.

About Newsletter Format Changes, Mailing and Distribution, and a Pastoral Health Note

I've put up a few blog posts which, when taken together, are approximately like the newsletters produced in past years for Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry. I think some explanation is warranted.

When we first founded Wittenberg Door, email newsletters were a common thing. We communicated with a list of followers, participants, possible participants, supporters, and church congregation this way regularly. But as time went on, we found it increasingly difficult to maintain the mailing system. We also found that a lot of people, over time, were treating our updates as spam.

A few years ago, in an attempt to boost visibility more, and with the philosophy that putting a piece of paper into people's hands was more effective at creating that visibility, we started mailing a newsletter. For some time, it was monthly, or possibly 10-11 times per year. During the last few years, mailing costs have risen steeply.

Web traffic has remained relatively constant, increasing gradually over the years. So we've decided to have a hybrid type of newsletter. Please let us know if you would like to be receiving our news via postal mail. We will probably keep sending newsletters in print to local church congregations in any case. It's much easier for a local church leader to take something out of an envelope and post it on a bulletin board or distribute copies to the congregation physically than it is to get someone to remember to print out a copy and post it. However, if we are told of your preference for an electronic newsletter, you will save us over a dollar in printing and postage costs each time we send something out. Those little amounts add up significantly throughout the year.

Now, why haven't you received a Wittenberg Door newsletter since June of 2025? Since Pastor Spotts cut back in hours early in 2025, one of the cutbacks was intended to be less frequent newsletters. Now we have decided that, since web traffic has actually been increasing, we'll just put out fairly frequent blog posts that represent one or another part of a normal newsletter. They are tagged "newsletter" and can be found easily on the blog at www.wittenbergcomo.com. After a few have built up, my plan is to pull them together into one .pdf newsletter and send them out via email, social media announcement, and postal mail.

There have been some delays in implementing this flow of news. Beginning in September of 2025 and increasing since then, Pastor Spotts has been dealing with a health issue. It began with disorientation, fatigue, and pain. This increased significantly through October and November, and culminated in Pastor Spotts going onto an unpaid leave of absence from his work with the hospital ministry as of the end of December. There have been lots and lots of tests, and we think the underlying issue has been identified. We're still attempting to identify an adequate medical regimen that will bring relief from the worst of the symptoms. All that to say, from the time we would have tried to get a newsletter out until now, production of a newsletter has not been a reasonable goal.

In the last few months, many activities have been cancelled, however, we have managed to keep up with the most basic and mission-critical activities, including what is proving to be a well attended Bible discussion group at a fraternity. It seems that some recovery is on the horizon and that we'll be able to get more involved again in the kind of programs we've had in the past. Meanwhile, we're doing what we can to care for the souls entrusted to us, to spread news locally about opportunities to minister to people, and to be sure that we are above reproach in all that we do.

Please take a moment and drop an email to Pastor Spotts at wittenbergcomo@gmail.com if you would like to be someone who checks for news on our blog. If you would like to be included in an email of our periodic newsletters in .pdf format, just say the word. And if you specifically want to be sure you receive a paper copy of the email, let me know that as well, along with your current postal address. And while you're at it, pray for the ongoing work of the Gospel in and around Columbia, Missouri.